

Remarks by Richard Trumka, AFL-CIO President
Panel Discussion on Outstanding Issues in TPP
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CAFTA fixed all the problems of NAFTA?

But the AFL-CIO, together with several Central American labor unions, filed two petitions under CAFTA—one in 2008 and one in 2012. The petitions alleged that Guatemala and Honduras have failed to meet the very basic standard of enforcing their own labor laws.

In both cases, the U.S. government agreed that the petitions had merit. But seven years later, a dispute settlement panel has yet to hear the Guatemala case. And it took the Administration almost three years to publish a simple report on the Honduras case. Meanwhile, workers wait for justice.

In May 2007, we believed that the deal forged by the Bush administration and congressional Democrats represented a meaningful improvement for workers and the environment.

Yet eight years later, workers in Colombia still regularly face illegal firings, threats, intimidation, and assassinations -- and Peru has rolled back environmental laws.

There is a huge disconnect under our FTAs between enforceability and actual enforcement. The GAO has criticized U.S. monitoring and enforcement of labor provisions in trade deals. This Administration has never self-initiated a labor complaint under any of our FTAs, and when we have filed a petition, we have seen more delays than action.

It is now four years since the implementation of the Colombia Labor Action Plan, and 105 unionists have been assassinated for union activities. If that's not cause for a complaint, I don't know what is. Again, workers wait for justice.

TPP supporters have admitted that NAFTA hurt workers. They ask us to believe that "This time it's different."

It seems to us the burden of proof is on the supporters of these deals to demonstrate what's different – especially since we understand that the labor provisions in TPP are quite similar to those in the Colombia, Korea, and Panama deals.

"Trust us" is no longer convincing.

Vietnam, Mexico, Brunei and Malaysia — all TPP countries — are notorious labor and human rights violators, currently out of compliance with the standards supposedly in the TPP. There is no known plan to withhold TPP benefits until these countries comply. This tells us all we need to know.

To create real change in trade policy, workers are counting on Congress to use its leverage to make sure that the promises made about the TPP are real.

The only way to do that, in our view, is to reject traditional fast track, to open up the text to the public, and to work on making changes, not just in the labor chapter but across the agreement.